

E.P.C. Welsh Drama Series, No. 12

THE BAKEHOUSE

A GOSSIPS' COMEDY

(In One Act).

By

J. O. FRANCIS

Author of "Change," "The Poacher," etc.



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no. 12

CHARACTERS.

MRS. HOWELLS.

MRS. BETSI EVANS.

MRS. MORGAN.

MRS. RICHARDS.

JINNIE RICHARDS—Mrs. Richards's daughter.

MRS. PRICE SHOP LOSHIN.

MRS. JONES SHOP FLANNEL.

MAGGIE HOWELLS—Mrs. Howells's daughter.

SCENE: A bakehouse on the Twmp, Aberpandy,
South Wales.

TIME : The present.

The two pictures used in the Play may be obtained
from the Educational Publishing Co., Cardiff.

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THE BAKEHOUSE.

[SCENE.—A Bakehouse; on the right (from stage to audience) in the middle of wall, the oven. Left back, in corner, a door. Middle of back, a window. Right front corner, upturned wooden box. Table at back, a foot or two away from wall—while being scrubbed. Left of this table a chair. Table against left wall; chair at end of this table near front of stage. In back right hand corner stand a sweeping brush and a short-handled bake-house shovel. Near by, on nails, hang two pieces of white cloth. On table at back are a lighted candle and four or five empty bread tins. On table to left are three or four loaves of bread. On wall, near oven, hangs a cheap clock.

Stage in half-darkness with faint red glow about oven. Bakehouse is lit either by oil lamp on wall, or by electric lamp.

MRS. BETSI EVANS, with a bucket of hot water and a scrubbing brush, is busily washing table at back. There is a knock at a door off left. BETSI goes quietly to bakehouse door and listens. Door without opens.]

MRS. MORGAN (*without*): Is Mrs. Evans in please?

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MRS. EVANS (*with a gesture of irritation*):
Well, tan i marw!

VOICE (*without*): No, indeed. In the bake-house she is, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN: Oh! Thank you.

(*Knock at bake-house door.*)

MRS. EVANS: Dewch mewn!

(*Enter MRS. MORGAN with a tea-tray and tea-cloth.*)

MRS. MORGAN: Oh, Mrs. Evans——

MRS. EVANS: It's you, Mrs. Morgan, is it? Shw'da'chi heno? Hanner mined! I'll just turn up the light.

(*She crosses, turns up the light, blows out candle. Full light on stage. MRS. MORGAN comes in and stands close to table at back. She is a pretty young woman of twenty-one, neatly and daintily dressed. BETSI is seen to be a work-worn woman of about fifty-five.*)

MRS. MORGAN (*with great anxiety*): Is it—is it ready yet, Mrs. Evans?

MRS. EVANS: Ready? Diwedd annwyl, no! It will take nearly another hour yet.

MRS. MORGAN: Another hour? I was thinking, Mrs. Evans, p'raps——

MRS. EVANS (*looking at clock*): Well, three-quarters since you're asking. Quarter past nine it is now. But sit down you.

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(MRS. MORGAN *takes chair front left corner.*)

MRS. MORGAN (*nervously*): Mrs. Evans—p'raps you—would you mind just having a look to see how it's getting on?

MRS. EVANS (*surprised*): Dir caton pobin, Mrs. Morgans fach! If I was so much as to open the oven door just now, the bread would get that flat you'd think it was only pancakes.

MRS. MORGAN (*taken aback*): Oh! I didn't know.

MRS. EVANS: And you didn't mark your two loaves either, Mrs. Morgan—

MRS. MORGAN: Mark them?

MRS. EVANS (*coming forward*): Yes. Put on a bit of a pattern or p'raps stick your initials in with a fork, so as to know them when they come out.

MRS. MORGAN: Oh dear, dear! I didn't think. Does it matter?

MRS. EVANS: I've put them in the corner by the wall. Mrs. Howells is the only other one that doesn't mark her bread, and, of course, she's got her own tins with her name on them. It's your first bread, I suppose, Mrs. Morgan?

MRS. MORGAN: Yes. My husband always had it home-made before we got married; so I—so I thought I'd try.

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MRS. EVANS : Quite right, too, Mrs. Morgan. It shows a proper spirit. Excuse me going on washing, but the water's nice and hot. (*Resumes scrubbing.*) Your mother-in-law always made some of the best loaves that ever went out of this bakehouse, Mrs. Morgan—excepting Mrs. Howells of course. If the angels in Heaven started baking to-morrow, they couldn't make a lighter crust than Mary Ann Howells's !

MRS. MORGAN : You didn't happen to notice the dough when you put it in ? (*Timorously*) : Did it—did it look as if it ever would be bread, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Well, yn y wir now, I was so busy I didn't pay much notice.

MRS. MORGAN : My husband is so fond of home-made bread, Mrs. Evans. But of course, being brought up in the millinery——

MRS. EVANS : Yes, yes. Of course ! But you'll learn, come you, you'll learn. And how do you like living in Tredegar Terrace, Mrs. Morgan ? Let me see ! You've been married nearly a month now ?

MRS. MORGAN : A month next Monday, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS : Well, mawredd, how time goes to be sure ! And you went away for a week didn't you ?

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MRS. MORGAN : Ten days, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS : To the Mumbles, wasn't it ?

Mrs. Jones Shop Flannel was telling me.

MRS. MORGAN : Yes, to the Mumbles. He's very fond of the seaside is my husband.

MRS. EVANS : I went so far as the Mumbles once myself. That was with Yanto, my first husband, Mrs. Morgan. Long ago, Mrs. Morgan fack ! (*Pauses in the scrubbing to sigh.*) Long ago indeed ! Zachariah wasn't so much for the water, poor Zachariah ! (*Sighs dolorously.*)

MRS. MORGAN (*sympathetically*) : Have you buried him long, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS (*pathetically*) : Which d'you mean, Mrs. Morgan—Zachariah ? Oh, yes ! Over six years now indeed. He was a godly man, Mrs. Morgan ; a proper saint on earth if ever there was one. Leader of the Rechabites for years. Poor Yanto now was more worldly.

MRS. MORGAN : You've had an awful lot of trouble, Mrs. Evans, losing both of them like that.

MRS. EVANS : A lot of trouble, Mrs. Morgan fack—a lot of trouble. Still there's some consolation for a woman to know she's had two, and the men getting so scarce as they are. (*Stopping work for a moment and coming down.*) I've just had two big likenesses made of them, Mrs. Morgan, one of Yanto and one of Zachariah ; and beautiful

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to behold they are. Cost me fifteen shillings, Mrs. Morgan, including the frames of course. Pritchard the Photo-shop it was that did them for me ; from two old photographs ; that's all mind you ! (*Resumes scrubbing.*) If I was you, Mrs. Morgan, I'd have one done of your Davy——

MRS. MORGAN : Plenty of time to think of that, I hope, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS : I hope so, indeed. But you never know. And if he should happen to go before you, it's nice to have his likeness on the wall in the parlour. And very nice parlours you've got in Tredegar Terrace, too, there's no denying.

MRS. MORGAN : Oh, yes ! We're very comfortable, I'm sure.

MRS. EVANS : You're settling down on the Twmp here now, Mrs. Morgan, no doubt ? Bit strange at first, I suppose, after being down there in the Paris House in Dyffryn Street ?

MRS. MORGAN : We're getting on very well, thank you, Mrs. Evans. (*After a little hesitation.*) But I must say there are some people who might find something better to do than running down their neighbours——

MRS. EVANS (*consolingly*) : But after all, Mrs. Morgan, there's very few pay any real attention to Mrs. Richards the Checkweigher——

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MRS. MORGAN : Oh ! I don't want to mention any names, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS : No, no ! Of course ! Of course ! But p'raps it's only natural that she and her daughter Jinnie should look a bit black on you. You know what girls are these days.

MRS. MORGAN (*with dignity*) : I'm sure I've got no grudge against Miss Richards.

MRS. EVANS : Well no ! But, you see, you married him. She didn't. And, of course, they always were a bit free with their tongues—especially since that eldest girl married a preacher ; though it isn't for me to say anything against them, and them baking two large and two small regular twice a week.

MRS. MORGAN (*getting up, startled*) : Are they baking here with you, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Oh, yes ! They've got their bread in to-night.

MRS. MORGAN : To-night ? Will they be coming here then, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Mrs. Richards, or else Jinnie, or p'raps both. It's Jinnie does the baking there now——

MRS. MORGAN (*trying to be very casual*) : Jinnie Richards makes very good bread, of course ?

MRS. EVANS : Oh ! Middling. Pretty fair indeed !

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MRS. MORGAN: What time do they come, Mrs. Evans?

MRS. EVANS: It all depends. Sometimes early, sometimes late.

MRS. MORGAN (*anxiously*): D'you think, Mrs. Evans—as a favour—you could take my two loaves out first?

MRS. EVANS: But they're far in—close to the wall. Didn't I tell you?

MRS. MORGAN: And ten o'clock is the earliest possible. You couldn't just——

MRS. EVANS: Ten o'clock sharp!

MRS. MORGAN (*going towards door*): I'll be back just before ten then.

MRS. EVANS: Dyna fe. About ten.

(As MRS. MORGAN goes out, MRS. MARY ANN HOWELLS comes in, to MRS. MORGAN'S left. She is a woman of about fifty, poorly dressed and wearing an old apron. Her face preserves the suggestion of by-gone good looks. Her speech is slow and pleasant with a certain reflectiveness in it. There is a lurking humour in her eyes. She has a copy of the "South Wales Echo" in her hand.)

MRS. HOWELLS (*nodding genially to MRS. MORGAN*): Noswath dda, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN: Good night, Mrs. Howells.
(She goes out and is seen passing the window.)

MRS. EVANS: Shw' ma'i heno, Mary Ann

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MRS. HOWELLS (*crossing to box on right, and taking her seat wearily*): Oh! weddol, Betsi fach, weddol! But it's a hard day of it I've had—what with the extra baking and getting a bed ready for my brother-in-law.

MRS. EVANS: So he's coming on a visit after all, then? I didn't quite understand when your Maggie brought five loaves instead of three, as usual. (*Saying this, takes up bucket and crosses towards door. Then pauses to listen to MRS. HOWELLS.*)

MRS. HOWELLS: Yes. We're going to have John William with us for a couple of weeks. As soon as he heard that our Evan had been broken out of the Chapel for drinking, he wrote and said he was coming to stay a fortnight.

MRS. EVANS: Taw sôn, gel! But he was that kind of man before going to America. And to think of him coming back with all that money, and looking just like Buffalo Bill! Well, Mary Ann, I hope he won't come empty-handed, however. There's one thing, he can't take it with him when he dies.

(*She goes out for a moment, and is heard emptying out the bucket.*)

MRS. HOWELLS: Well, I won't say a few pounds wouldn't come in handy with our Evan as he is. But I've roughed it enough in this old world,

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and I can manage. It's of the little girl I'm thinking. I'd be glad if he put a bit by for her to fall back on after my days.

(MRS. EVANS *pushes table at back to wall, puts bucket in right hand corner at back, and, taking broom, begins to sweep the floor, but breaks off repeatedly to enjoy the conversation.*)

MRS. EVANS : So, after all, in a way of speaking, Mary Ann, it was a good thing Richards the Checkweigher brought your Evan before the Chapel ?

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, if the little girl was to gain anything by John William coming, there's no thanks due to the Richardses. I'm not denying Evan is fond of his glass. But there was no call for Richards to bring him before the Chapel, especially with Mrs. Richards using my mangle as she used to.

MRS. EVANS : But, I suppose, Mary Ann—between me and you—it is true your Evan was brought home on a wheelbarrow ?

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, Betsi, it isn't for me to say he was—being his wife ; and, being a Christian woman, it isn't for me to say he wasn't. But what I do say is, there was no need for the Richardses to make a fuss about it.

MRS. EVANS : There's no denying Mrs. Richards got very high and mighty when her eldest girl

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married the preacher ; and there's no holding her now Richards is made a deacon.

MRS. HOWELLS : By one vote, Betsi. I'd as soon vote for Cohen the Pawnbroker !

MRS. EVANS : Of course they bring a lot of bread to the bakehouse.

MRS. HOWELLS : And it's nothing to make a song about either, is the Richards's bread.

MRS. EVANS : Middling—just middling. Very thick in the crust on times, Mary Ann ; very thick on times.

MRS. HOWELLS : What I've always said is, barm or yeast. Stick to one or the other. I can't abide a woman that's always shilly-shallying with the both.

MRS. EVANS : Well, of course, you ought to know if anybody did, Mary Ann.

MRS. HOWELLS : Not that I'm saying a woman oughtn't to use barm if she can't get good yeast. Oh, no !

MRS. EVANS : No, no. Of course ! Of course !

MRS. HOWELLS : There's me now. I went to the Top Shop for yeast this morning. Such trash, my girl—well, you ought to have seen it ! Rise ? You'd want a balloon to rise it. So I sent our Maggie up to the brewery for some barm.

MRS. EVANS : Quite right, too, Mary Ann. I don't know what's coming over Thomas Lewis

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Top Shop. Such a tidy man he used to be, too!

MRS. HOWELLS: Aay! I remember him well. Great friend of our Evan, and of your Yanto, too, come to that! (*Reflectively.*) Der! times have changed on us all.

MRS. EVANS: D'you remember me telling you, Mary Ann, about taking the two photographs to Pritchard?

MRS. HOWELLS (*with interest*): Yes, yes! Yanto and Zachariah?

MRS. EVANS: Well, I've had the likenesses.

MRS. HOWELLS (*jumping up*): No!

MRS. EVANS: Ie, yn wir. Grand likenesses they are, too!

MRS. HOWELLS: You don't say! Let's have a look, Betsi fach.

MRS. EVANS: I'll go and get them.

MRS. HOWELLS: Yes, quick.

(BETSI replaces broom, hurries off, and returns with two large pictures wrapped in brown paper. MRS. HOWELLS shows signs of great interest. MRS. EVANS, having unwrapped the first, stands it on table at back against the wall. The portrait, badly done in crayon, is of a careless, happy-looking man.)

Well, tan i marw! Yanto—the living image of him, Betsi! Poor Yanto, such a happy laugh he

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had, you'd think there was no such thing as trouble in the world!

MRS. EVANS (*unwrapping the second picture*): And here's Zachariah.

(*Stands picture of Zachariah on table. It shows a thin-faced, severe-looking man with side-whiskers.*)

MRS. HOWELLS: Well, diwedd annwyl, Betsi fach! The spit moral of him—just as he used to be, sitting in the sêf fawr in Horeb.

MRS. EVANS: They'll be a great comfort to me, Mary Ann, a great comfort. They cost me fifteen shillings the pair; but I couldn't have one without the other. It wouldn't be right to make a difference between them.

MRS. HOWELLS (*resuming her seat, still looking at the pictures*): It takes us back a long time, Betsi fach! It's a long time since you and Yanto Pugh the Pop began walking out on Bryndu.

MRS. EVANS (*picking up the pictures*): Well, we had our day, Mary Ann, we had our day, and poor Zachariah was hardly in his grave when Jenkins y Gof offered me a row of taters in his garden. But when a woman's tried two of them, Mary Ann, it would be like tempting Providence to want a third. (*Sighing.*) I'll be back in a minute. (*Takes pictures out.*)

(MRS. HOWELLS *smiles reflectively and sighs to herself. Then she crosses to table on left and*

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examines bread with a critical eye. She goes back to the box as MRS. EVANS comes in. Re-enter MRS. EVANS with a stocking she is knitting.)

MRS. EVANS : I was thinking just now about those old days when Mrs. Morgan was in. She's only been married a month.

MRS. HOWELLS : Has she started baking her own bread ?

MRS. EVANS : Yes. She's got two in to-night.

MRS. HOWELLS : Oh, indeed ! Large or Small ?

MRS. EVANS : Small.

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, people may say what they like, but I've always believed the small loaves bake more even. I'd never make large myself.

MRS. EVANS : It's her first baking ; and pretty excited about it she is, I can tell you.

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, its only natural.

MRS. EVANS : She even forgot to mark it.

MRS. HOWELLS : Taw sôn ! Forgot to mark it ?

MRS. EVANS : But I've put it in the corner by the wall, so that I'll know.

MRS. HOWELLS : Nice little thing she is I'd say from the look of her.

MRS. EVANS : Oh, yes ! Tidy little woman. Mrs. Price Shop Loshin says she's too stuck-up, its true.

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MRS. HOWELLS : But then, according to Mrs. Price Shop Loshin, everybody's too stuck up that won't waste half the morning talking over the wall.

MRS. EVANS : And of course, Mrs. Price is thick as thieves with Mrs. Richards the Check-wiegher.

MRS. HOWELLS : I suppose Mrs. Richards will never get over it that Davy Morgan didn't marry her Jinnie after all ?

MRS. EVANS : Well, you see, there's no denying it is a good business, and Davy'll get it all after the old man's days.

MRS. HOWELLS : They thought a lot of his wife down there at the Paris House, and I'll say this for her whatever—that bonnet she made for our Sarah when Matthew died was almost enough to make a woman thankful to be a widow.

(MRS. MORGAN *is seen passing the window.*)

MRS. EVANS : H'sh ! Here she is.

MRS. HOWELLS : Who ?

MRS. EVANS : Mrs. Morgan.

(*There is a knock and the door opens. Enter MRS. MORGAN with tray and cloth as before. She stands by table at back.*)

MRS. HOWELLS (*tactfully changing the conversation*) : And, of course, I told him he'd better come back in the morning. Oh ! It's Mrs. Morgan !

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MRS. MORGAN : I thought it might be ready now, Mrs. Evans——

MRS. EVANS : But, mawredd, Mrs. Morgans fach, it's only twenty-five to ten.

MRS. MORGAN : That's all ? But, Mrs. Evans, couldn't you just look ?

MRS. HOWELLS (*kindly*) : It's your first baking, I suppose, Mrs. Morgan ?

(MRS. MORGAN *comes down stage on the left.*)

MRS. MORGAN (*trying to be casual*) : Well, in a way, yes. My husband is very fond of home-made, Mrs. Howells.

MRS. EVANS : Shows his good sense, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN : And of course, it's a woman's business to get her husband everything he wants.

MRS. HOWELLS (*smiling*) : Er—how long did you say you'd been married ?

MRS. MORGAN : Nearly a month. (*Seeing MRS. HOWELLS exchange glances with MRS. EVANS.*) I—I—you're making fun, Mrs. Howells. (*She draws herself up.*)

MRS. HOWELLS : No, I'm not making fun, Mrs. Morgan. But it isn't a woman's business to get her husband everything he wants.

MRS. MORGAN : No ? What is it then ?

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MRS. HOWELLS (*reflectively*): Well, I'd say now it's her business to keep him from wanting everything she can't get.

MRS. MORGAN: What d'you mean? I don't think I understand.

MRS. HOWELLS: Never you mind then. You will some day.

MRS. EVANS: Don't you notice her, Mrs. Morgan. She always had different ideas from anybody else.

MRS. MORGAN: But some men are different to others——

MRS. HOWELLS: I wonder!

MRS. EVANS: Well, there wasn't much alike about my two—beyond a coat and trousers.

MRS. MORGAN: And my husband's an exception——

MRS. HOWELLS: Every woman's husband is an exception, Mrs. Morgan—when she's only been married a month.

MRS. MORGAN (*turning away somewhat irritated*): I'll come back at ten, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS: Ten sharp it comes out.

MRS. MORGAN: And if—Mrs. Evans—suppose it isn't all right, p'raps you'd just put it aside without anybody seeing it?

MRS. EVANS: I'll do my best, whatever. But it isn't so easy when there's a bakehouse full of

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women. And you can venture the Richardses will want to have a look.

MRS. MORGAN (*troubled*): Yes. That's what I mean—the Richardses.

MRS. HOWELLS: Don't you vex about them, Mrs. Morgan. They're not worth it.

MRS. MORGAN: It's all very well for Jinnie Richards, that's been at home all her life. But if it came to making bonnets——

MRS. HOWELLS: Aay. Then she'd see; and, if you'll excuse me mentioning it, that was a grand little bonnet you made for our Sarah——

MRS. MORGAN: I'd rather make fifty of them than go through this day again.

MRS. EVANS: We've all had to go through it—the best of us; even Mrs. Howells here.

MRS. HOWELLS: Yes. But, to-day, when the talk is of baking, I can hold up my head with any woman in the valley. And I've got my own tins, too, with my name on them. Wara tæg i Evan! He does take a pride in the bread. What did you use, Mrs. Morgan, yeast or barm?

MRS. MORGAN: Yeast, Mrs. Howells. I got it at the Top Shop last night——

MRS. HOWELLS (*rising*): Wh-a-a-t? } (*Together*)

MRS. EVANS: Well, yn enw dyn! }

MRS. HOWELLS: Top Shop? Last night?

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MRS. MORGAN (*terrified*): Yes, that's where I'm dealing. Is there anything——

MRS. HOWELLS: Did you try it, Mrs. Morgan?

MRS. MORGAN: Try it?

MRS. HOWELLS: Yes. Mix it with warm water and sprinkle flour on it, and put it on the hob to see if it would rise?

MRS. MORGAN: No! Is that what I ought— (*Almost crying.*) It's spoiled! It's all spoiled! I know it's all spoiled. (*To MRS. EVANS, beseechingly.*) Don't let them see it, Mrs. Evans! Don't let them see it—not that Jinnie Richards!

MRS. HOWELLS: Let me see. You're living in Tredegar Terrace. Have you got any of that yeast left?

MRS. MORGAN: Yes; a lot. I thought I'd keep it for next time.

MRS. HOWELLS: Keep it? } (*Together.*)

MRS. EVANS: Keep yeast? }

(*They exchange glances.*)

MRS. HOWELLS: You'd better run home quick, and bring me a bit to look at.

MRS. EVANS: Yes. Do as she tells you. Leave the tray. Run now. Quick!

(*MRS. MORGAN goes off, leaving tray and cloth on table at back, and is seen hurrying past the window.*)

MRS. HOWELLS and MRS. EVANS stand looking at each other in astonishment and dismay.)

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MRS. HOWELLS : Betsi ?

MRS. EVANS : Well ?

MRS. HOWELLS : That bread won't rise with that Top Shop yeast—not if you leave it there till Judgment Day !

MRS. EVANS : And that's the girl Davy Morgan was so dull on !

MRS. HOWELLS : Pity for her, too, mind you ! She's young ; that's all.

MRS. EVANS : Well, if it's spoiled, it's spoiled !

MRS. HOWELLS : Can't we do something, Betsi ? I don't like to think of her looking simple before all the others, and her only newly married.

(Voices are heard without.)

MRS. EVANS : H'sh ! There's somebody coming.

(They both listen.)

MRS. HOWELLS : It's the Richardses ! *(She resumes her seat on the box.)*

MRS. EVANS : Yes ; both of them. *(Standing right side of table at back, begins to polish tins on table.)*

(Mrs. HOWELLS stiffens involuntarily as Mrs. RICHARDS and JINNIE come in. The atmosphere becomes frigid and formal. Mrs. RICHARDS is a middle-aged woman, sharp-visaged and angular. JINNIE is a fairly good-looking girl of twenty-five. She carries a tray.)

MRS. RICHARDS : Noswath dda 'chi, Mrs. Evans. *(Coldly.)* Good night, Mrs. Howells. *(Seats*

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herself on chair at end of table on left, facing MRS. HOWELLS.)

MRS. EVANS : Noswath dda ; noswath dda, Jinnie.

MRS. HOWELLS : Good night to you, Mrs. Richards. How are you, Miss Richards ?

JINNIE : Pretty well, thank you, indeed, Mrs. Howells.

MRS. RICHARDS : I suppose the bread won't be long now, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Not long now, indeed. Ishta lawr, Jinnie. *(Pointing to chair left of table at back.)*
(JINNIE takes seat.)

MRS. RICHARDS : I was just saying to Jinnie—
(Enter MRS. PRICE Shop Loshin, carrying tray.)

MRS. PRICE : Noswath dda 'chi i gyd ! Bread ready, Mrs. Evans ? *(Nods towards MRS. RICHARDS, taking position against table at back.)*

MRS. EVANS : Pretty near now, Mrs. Price.

(MRS. PRICE, after a curt nod towards MRS. HOWELLS, turns to JINNIE and whispers to her.)

MRS. EVANS *(to MRS. HOWELLS aside)* : It's all up on Mrs. Morgan and her bread now, Mary Ann !

MRS. PRICE : I didn't expect to find you here so early, Mrs. Richards.

MRS. RICHARDS *(to MRS. PRICE)* : Well, indeed, I was saying to our Jinnie here, p'raps Mrs.

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Price Shop Loshin would be up in the bakehouse a bit early. Wasn't I, Jinnie?

JINNIE : Yes, yes. Just after supper.

MRS. RICHARDS : Richards has gone down the valley to see my son-in-law. P'raps you've heard me mention my son-in-law the minister, Mrs Howells?

MRS. HOWELLS (*with frigid sweetness*) : Oh yes, Mrs. Richards, often ! (*Looks up from her newspaper, at which, from now on, she frequently glances between her remarks.*)

MRS. RICHARDS : I don't know why he should have such looks on Richards's opinion ; but he's always asking your father's advice, isn't he, Jinniefach?

JINNIE : Always, indeed ! D'you remember mam ?—it was father persuaded him to put in those broad beans by the wall.

MRS. EVANS : Well, indeed, now, say what you like ; there's nothing nicer than broad beans and a bit of bacon.

MRS. RICHARDS : Of course, they've made Richards a deacon in Horeb. That's one thing—

JINNIE : And my brother-in-law was saying he ought to have been elected years ago.

MRS. PRICE : Well, they made Jones Shop Flannel a deacon long enough ago, and if it comes to a matter of praying, Richards could pray him

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out of house and home. That's my opinion, however.

(Enter MRS. JONES *Shop Flannel*, standing in the doorway. She carries a plain basket.)

MRS. JONES : Is it out yet, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Only a few minutes now, Mrs. Jones. Come in, you !

(MRS. JONES *takes up position by table on left.*)

MRS. RICHARDS : And how is Mr. Jones to-night, Mrs. Jones ? Is the rheumatic on him all the time ?

MRS. JONES : Well, indeed, he's a bit better, Mrs. Richards. He was able to dig a few taters this morning.

MRS. RICHARDS : Very good, indeed. Da iawn yn wir ! (With *unctuous sympathy* to MRS. HOWELLS.) And how is your poor husband, Mrs. Howells ?

MRS. HOWELLS : Oh ! he's eating his allowance pretty hearty, thank you, Mrs. Richards.

MRS. RICHARDS : I feel I ought to tell you, Mrs. Howells, how sorry I am about what happened in Horeb. I've said all along it was such an awful pity. Our Jinnie here will tell you the same——

MRS. HOWELLS : I'm sure she will, Mrs. Richards.

MRS. RICHARDS : But Richards's conscience wouldn't let him rest. (MRS. HOWELLS *raises her*

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eye-brows.) And he'd not long been made a deacon.

MRS. HOWELLS : Every new broom sweeps clean, as we all know.

MRS. RICHARDS : And, of course, it was such a disgrace on the chapel.

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, I wouldn't like to be the one to say so, Mrs. Richards ; but you ought to know your own husband best——

(JINNIE RICHARDS *sees* MRS. MORGAN'S *cloth on table and picks it up.*)

MRS. RICHARDS (*haughtily*) : I am referring, Mrs. Howells, to your husband being brought home in a barrow on a Saturday night.

MRS. HOWELLS (*with mock humility*) : Oh ! I. beg your pardon. I didn't understand.

MRS. PRICE (*with a snort*) : Understand, indeed !

(*Turns away, as JINNIE rises with cloth in her hand*)

JINNIE : Nice little cloth, indeed, Mrs. Price. Yours is it ?

MRS. PRICE : No, not mine. (*Looking at name in corner.*) ' M. Morgan.' Well, yn y wir ! That Mrs. Morgan, Tredegar Terrace, I suppose ? Hers it is, Mrs. Evans ?

(MRS. RICHARDS and JINNIE *show signs of interest. The cloth is passed via MRS. JONES to MRS. RICHARDS, who examines it critically.*)

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MRS. EVANS : Yes, yes. Hers it is.

MRS. RICHARDS : So she's started baking then, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Yes.

JINNIE : How many has she got in, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. EVANS : Two.

JINNIE : Large or small ?

MRS. EVANS : Small.

JINNIE : What's her mark ?

MRS. EVANS : Well, indeed, she hasn't got a mark to-night.

MRS. PRICE : Got her own tins already then ?

MRS. EVANS : No. Bakehouse tins.

MRS. PRICE : Handy kind of wife, I must say, making bread and not putting her mark !

MRS. RICHARDS : You can't feed a man on bonnets, Mrs. Price.

MRS. JONES : Well, only beginning she is, I suppose.

MRS. PRICE : I'm a woman that speaks her mind, Mrs. Jones, as you know, and what I say is it beats me what come over Davy Morgan to take a wife like that.

MRS. JONES : I must say I've found her very nice-spoken.

MRS. PRICE : It's her uppish ways I can't abide, Mrs. Jones ; and there's meat there thrown away something sinful to behold, as no one knows

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better than me that lives next door and sees her ash-bucket.

MRS. EVANS : Well, indeed, I hear many on the Twmp here giving her a good word.

MRS. JONES : Yes, there you, many !

MRS. RICHARDS : People can be very deceiving, Mrs. Evans.

MRS. HOWELLS (*heartily*) : They can, Mrs. Richards.

MRS. RICHARDS (*ignoring* MRS. HOWELLS'S *remark*) : You know what girls are to-day, Mrs. Price.

MRS. HOWELLS : Very much what they were yesterday, I expect. Of course, Davy Morgan took us all by surprise up here on the Twmp, so sure we were he'd fixed his mind somewhere else——

JINNIE (*rising indignantly*) : I hope you don't think, Mrs. Howells——

MRS. HOWELLS (*soothingly*) : Oh ! No offence Miss Richards fach. No offence. I was only just saying like ; that's all——

JINNIE : I suppose there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

MRS. HOWELLS : Oh, yes ! Only, of course, in a way of speaking, it means you've got to go on fishing.

(JINNIE, *overwhelmed*, resumes her seat. MRS. RICHARDS stalks up majestically to table at back and puts down cloth with a bang.)

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MRS. RICHARDS (*looking fiercely at* MRS. HOWELLS) : Well, Jinnie fach, if ever you should happen to get married, I hope it'll be to a man that can walk home on a Saturday night.

(MRS. HOWELLS'S *lips tighten, but she says nothing.* MRS. PRICE, *looking at* MRS. RICHARDS, *nods approvingly.* Enter MAGGIE HOWELLS—a little girl of twelve. *She carries a basket.*)

MAGGIE (*in doorway*) : Mrs. Evans, has my—
Oh, there you are, mam!

MRS. HOWELLS (*lovingly*) : Yes. Here I am, Maggie fach. Dewch yma, merch i.

MAGGIE : I wasn't sure. So I thought I'd better come——

MRS. HOWELLS : The bread won't be long now.

MRS. EVANS : Five minutes ; that's all.

MRS. JONES (*stopping* MAGGIE) : Coming for the bread you were, Maggie fach ? Well, I hope some day you'll make bread as good as your mother's. Such lovely bread I never did see !

(*During this, MRS. PRICE produces a large piece of sweetmeat, which MAGGIE eyes with appreciation. She takes it and says, 'Thank you.' Then crosses and stands by her mother.*)

MRS. HOWELLS (*aside to* MAGGIE) : Did you say thank you ?

MAGGIE (*from a full mouth*) : Yes.

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MRS. HOWELLS (*to* MRS. JONES) : As bread goes about here, mine isn't so bad.

MRS. JONES : Three small you're baking all the time, I suppose ?

(MRS. HOWELLS *is about to answer when she is suddenly struck by an idea.*)

MRS. HOWELLS : Well—er—yes. Three small.

JINNIE : It's lucky, indeed, you are with such a small baking——

MAGGIE (*surprised*) : But there were——

MRS. HOWELLS (*tugging MAGGIE'S dress to quiet her, and glancing meaningly at MRS. EVANS.*) But it's quite enough twice a week, isn't it, Maggie fah ? (*She shows signs of suppressed excitement.*)

MRS. JONES : Well, I find it quite enough baking for a husband, to say nothing of a family——

MRS. HOWELLS : It is, indeed. And since you happened to mention husbands, did Mrs. Evans here show you the likenesses——

THE OTHERS (*with a slight movement forward*) : Likenesses ?

MRS. HOWELLS : Yes—her two husbands——

MRS. RICHARDS : Both of them ?

(*There is a general flutter of interest.*)

MRS. HOWELLS : Yes, Yanto and Zachariah. Framed beautiful, too, I can tell you.

MRS. JONES : Well, indeed, it shows a nice feeling having them both.

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MRS. HOWELLS : I thought you'd have shown them, Betsi—

MRS. PRICE : Yes, where are they ? Let's have a look. (*Turning towards* MRS. RICHARDS.) I was thinking of having one of our William——

(*For a second or two, in dumb show, she seems to be enlarging on the matter to* MRS. RICHARDS, MRS. JONES, *and* JINNIE.)

MRS. HOWELLS (*pulling* MRS. EVANS *to the front right corner*) : Get them out for five minutes. I've got an idea.

MRS. EVANS (*turning to the others*) : Well, there's just a few minutes. In the house they are.

(*She goes towards the door, followed by the others, except* MRS. HOWELLS *and* MAGGIE. *All go off, talking together.*)

MRS. HOWELLS (*jumping up briskly*) : Now, Maggie, fy nghariad i, stand by the door and tell me if you see anyone coming.

MAGGIE (*running to the door*) : All right, mam. (*Stands looking out.*)

MRS. HOWELLS (*hurriedly opening oven door*) : And mindia di nawr, Maggie, if anyone was to ask you, it's only *three* loaves we've baked to-day.

MAGGIE : But there were five——

MRS. HOWELLS : P'raps so. But there's only three if they ask you. Let me see now—in the corner by the wall. Dyna fe ! Dyna fe ! There's

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plenty of lies being told every day to do people harm. I'm sure the Almighty can excuse just one to help a young married woman baking her first bread. I've been young myself ; and I know what it is.

(Seizing a cloth from nail in the right back corner, takes out two tins holding a dull pasty mass.)

Ach y fi ! No more like bread than I'm like the Queen of England ! *(Tips out contents of tins on box on which she sat. Puts tins on box also.)* Anyone coming, Maggie ?

MAGGIE : Not yet, mam.

MRS. HOWELLS : Nawr ta ! Two of mine. *(Takes two tins of very good bread from oven and tips them out on table at back.)* There's no mark on them, thank goodness !

MAGGIE *(advancing towards table)* : But that's our bread——

MRS. HOWELLS : Look you down the road. The less you see in this old world the less there is to tell lies about. *(She transfers the two good loaves to MRS. MORGAN'S tins and puts them back into oven, closing it carefully.)* Anybody coming ?

MAGGIE. No.

MRS. HOWELLS *(gathering up her own two empty tins and MRS. MORGAN'S abortive bread to stow the lot out of sight under the box)* : Mrs. Morgan may have brought in two tins of putty. But if Mrs. Richards is going to look on, Mrs. Morgan

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will be taking out as good bread as any in this blessed bakehouse to-night. And that's a slap in the face for old mother Richards! Now you just run home and forget, Maggie fach. It takes a woman as wicked as me to deal with a woman as good as Mrs. Richards. And if anything shifts me off this old box for a bit, it'll be nothing short of sudden death. (*Sits down in a most determined way. Voices are heard from the house as she takes her seat.*) Cera shathre, Maggie. Cera waft!

(MAGGIE goes out.)

MRS. RICHARDS (*without*): Yes, Mrs. Evans, if there's one thing I do like to see, it's people showing respect for the dead.

(*Enter MRS. RICHARDS. Takes former position.*)

MRS. PRICE (*as she enters*): Anything more like I never did see—never!

(*Takes position by table on left, near MRS. RICHARDS.*)

MRS. JONES (*to MRS. EVANS, as they come in together*): One each side of the fire-place—it's only right, Mrs. Evans! It wouldn't be fair to make a difference.

(*MRS. JONES takes position by table at back. MRS. EVANS crosses towards MRS. HOWELLS, who whispers to her, pointing to oven as if explaining.*)

JINNIE (*entering quickly*): She's coming.

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(Takes up position left of MRS. JONES. MRS. MORGAN is seen hurrying past window.)

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, Betsi, how about the bread ?

(BETSI opens oven door. MRS. MORGAN appears. Seeing the RICHARDSSES, she is nonplussed. The RICHARDSSES stiffen in their manner.)

MRS. HOWELLS : Oh ! Come back you have, Mrs. Morgan ? Brought me that bit of yeast, I hope ?

MRS. MORGAN *(going quickly towards MRS. HOWELLS)* : I couldn't find it at first.

MRS. HOWELLS *(taking yeast)* : Thank you very much. *(Smelling it, makes a grimace of disgust.)* Lovely bit of yeast it is, too. Here's the bread coming out now, however !

(MRS. MORGAN gasps and retreats a few steps, taking position to MRS. JONES'S right, by table at back. JINNIE moves over to MRS. PRICE and her mother.)

MRS. MORGAN *(staring fascinated at the oven)* : Is—it—is it ready, Mrs. Evans ?

MRS. HOWELLS : Got mine there, Betsi ?

MRS. EVANS : Yes. Here they are—beauties, too, indeed !

(Takes out three loaves counting 'one—two—three' ; puts them on table at back.)

MRS. HOWELLS : Three. That's my lot.

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(MRS. JONES looks at MRS. HOWELLS'S bread with frank admiration. MRS. RICHARDS and Co. eye it sideways with ill-disguised envy. MRS. MORGAN looks at it with a kind of solemn awe.)

MRS. EVANS (turning again to oven) : And here's yours, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN (with a gasp) : Oh !

(THE RICHARDS faction move in a little, watching.)

MRS. EVANS : Two, isn't it—bake-house tins, and no mark ?

MRS. MORGAN (in extremis, murmuring) : Ye-s-s.

MRS. EVANS : Here we are then !

(Produces two splendid loaves and advances a few steps, holding them out. There is a general murmur.)

MRS. MORGAN claps her hands with a cry of delight.)

MRS. JONES : Da iawn, merch i ! Ardderchog, yn y wir !

MRS. HOWELLS : Not so bad, indeed ! What do you say, Mrs. Richards ?

MRS. RICHARDS (mincingly) : I'm sure I'm very glad——

MRS. HOWELLS : I'm sure you are.

MRS. MORGAN : Are these—mine ?

(MRS. EVANS nods.)

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MRS. HOWELLS (*rising, takes loaves from tins with apron, taps them and examines them critically*) : A nice bit of bread, Mrs. Morgan—a good bit of bread. Might be a bit more even in the crust, p'raps ; but a tidy bit of bread. I wouldn't be ashamed to see it in my own tins.

(MRS. MORGAN *turns round and takes up her tray. MRS. JONES opens out the cloth. With a laugh of triumph and a victorious glance towards JINNIE, MRS. MORGAN holds out tray to MRS. HOWELLS, who puts loaves on. MRS. JONES covers them reverentially. MRS. MORGAN turns to go.*)

MRS. EVANS : That'll be a penny, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN : Oh, yes ! I was forgetting. (*Hands tray to MRS. JONES ; produces purse and pays MRS. EVANS ; takes tray again ; to MRS. HOWELLS.*) P'raps you'll come up and have a cup of tea with me one day this week, Mrs. Howells ?

MRS. HOWELLS : Well, it's very kind of you asking, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN : Suppose we say to-morrow ?

MRS. HOWELLS : All right, to-morrow. Diolch yn fawr.

MRS. MORGAN : I generally have a cup by myself at four o'clock. But, if you'd rather, my husband has tea at six.

MRS. HOWELLS (*significantly*) : I think I'd better come at four, Mrs. Morgan.

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MRS. MORGAN : Very well. We can have a little chat to ourselves.

MRS. HOWELLS (*smiling kindly*) : Yes, I'd like a little chat to ourselves.

MRS. MORGAN (*triumphantly in exit*) : Good night, Mrs. Richards ; good night, Miss Richards.

(MRS. RICHARDS *and party, crushed and crest-fallen, turn slowly and stare at her as she goes out.*
MRS. HOWELLS *resumes her seat, sighing softly to herself.*)

CURTAIN.



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